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## PORTRAIT OF JEREMIAH BELKNAP BY JOSEPH BADGER

A portrait typical in every way of the artist's work is the Jeremiah Belknap by Joseph Badger which has been recently purchased by the Museum and hung in Gallery I. Badger was born of humble parentage in Charlestown, Massachusetts, March 14, 1708, and is thus, with the single exception of Nathaniel Emmons, of whose work practically nothing is yet known, the earliest of our native-born painters. Of his training we have no information, although he may have derived something from Smibert or from a study of his work, and all information on this point lacking, we may assume that he was largely self-taught. His entire professional life was passed in Boston, and like many others of the early colonial portrait painters he began his career as a house-painter and glazier, and like them continued this work throughout his life, besides painting signs, hatchments and other heraldic devices in order to eke out a livelihood when orders for portraits slackened. His work as a portrait-painter probably started seriously not before 1740, and about 1756 he began to be eclipsed by the rapidly increasing fame and superior talents of Copley. He continued, however, to paint assiduously until his death, which we learn from the contemporary newspaper notice was caused by apoplexy and took place at Boston on May 11, 1765. Although he is not mentioned in any of Copley's correspondence which has yet come to light it is highly probable that Badger, Copley's elder by thirty years and his fellow-townsmen in a community numbering less than fifteen thousand inhabitants, gave some instruction to the younger man, a belief which is strengthened by a comparison of Copley's portrait of Reverend William Welsteed, painted in 1753, with Badger's work of the same period. He showed but little originality in posing his subjects, following in a general way the precedents established by Lely and Kueller and the lesser artists of the English school. Certain well-defined mannerisms are constantly appearing in his work; and in his portraits of children, of which the Belknap is an example, he habitually showed them standing, usually holding a flower or some fruit, or accompanied by a fat bird, squirrel or dog, and, although stiff and formal, they well express the primness of the time and have a quaintness and a naïve and piquant charm which is irresistible. While in no sense of the word that of a

great artist, Badger's work is interesting historically as representing a link in the progress of American art, and in passing judgment upon it one should bear in mind the difficulties under which he labored in an atmosphere not particularly congenial to art, with an almost utter absence of material for study, and a lack of anything approaching adequate instruction. He took himself seriously, knew his limitations and kept well within them, and conscientiously put forth the best that was in him. Attended apparently throughout his life by a condition approaching poverty, he was prevented, unlike Smibert, Blackburn and Copley, from entering the higher social life of Boston, so that at his death he was forgotten; and of the eighty-nine portraits from his brush which have come down to us, all, with a dozen exceptions, have, until the last two or three years, been known either as the work of an unknown man or as that of one of the other of his three contemporaries just mentioned.

Aside from the fact that he was born May 14, 1752, the son of Jeremiah and Mary (Rand) Belknap, of Boston, nothing is known of the subject of the portrait under discussion. He is, however, without much doubt the boy of that name who was in 1768 a scholar at the South Writing School in Boston and the Jeremiah Belknap whose estate was settled, according to the probate records in Boston, in 1830.

His portrait, showing him at the age of six or seven years, was necessarily painted not far from 1758. He stands firmly at full length, with feet slightly apart, dressed in his best clothes—a long-tailed coat of ashes-of-roses color, with silver buttons, a bluish green waistcoat, dark brown knee-breeches with knee-buckles, white stockings, low black shoes with gold buckles, a white ruff about the neck, a white linen shirt-ruffle, and a black ribbon with long ends crossing his breast—a costume similar in almost every particular to that which his father was wearing at the same time. His dark brown hair is brushed back from a very high forehead and falls in curls at his neck, and his large dark brown eyes are directed to the spectator. In his right hand he holds a peach, and his left arm hangs at his side with a black cocked hat with silver braid tucked under it. Dark brownish green foliage with distant trees and sky with yellowish and greenish browns form the background, and the usual animal accompaniment is furnished by the introduction in the lower right-

hand corner of a small spaniel, who sits upon his haunches and gazes up into the boy's face. The picture, which is singularly free from restoration, measures  $42\frac{1}{8}$  inches in height and 33 inches in width, and is almost identical in pose with Badger's portrait of John Joy, of Boston, which was painted at about the same time.

L.P.

#### A CHINESE WOODEN FIGURE OF THE T'ANG DYNASTY (618-907 A.D.)

The illustration on page 118 gives a very good idea of an important example of Chinese sculpture which has been exhibited this summer as a loan in Gallery XIII. Only a few wooden figures of this early date have come to our notice, and it was hoped that this particular one would become a permanent addition to our collections. However, the necessary funds seem unavailable, and now that the time draws near for its return to its owner we present it to our *Bulletin* readers for future reference.

The figure was originally covered with a layer of gesso upon which the colors were applied. The cutting of the wood, therefore, was somewhat roughly done, the finished surface being carefully modeled in the gesso, and finally colored to complete the naturalistic effect. The scarf over the shoulders of the deity is gilded, showing here and there a deep red lining, and a knotted band is draped over the left shoulder, falling to the right hip, reminding one in its use of the *janeo*, or knotted cotton thread worn by Brahmins. The skirt is also gilded, with slight traces of red and green, which, though almost entirely gone, were probably originally narrow bands of decoration. It is held in position at the waist by a narrow blue belt tied with a square knot. The hair, which is colored light blue, is looped in a mass at the top of the head and held with a red band which appears to have an ornament, or clasp. Another red band holds the crown, below which the hair is rolled back from the forehead, terminating in a twisted strand falling from behind the ear to the shoulder. Both the crown and the necklace are detached pieces of carving, glued to the head and breast. Plain golden ornaments are carved on the upper arm and on the wrists.

The flesh is a golden-red tone which, unfortunately, has peeled from the face and some other parts. The eyes are partly closed, but piercing, with small black inlaid eyeballs of glass.